

No. 11

Current Thought.

Continued

II

If we study the language and legends of savage races we find that though the remote past is involved in obscurity, yet the centuries that are open to investigation bear witness to two facts. First, a constant downward tendency is noted, and, second, on all hands, clear reminiscences of an earlier and better time are preserved and marked occasionally by monuments or other memorials. History shows that in only one nation of antiquity was monotheism maintained clearly and distinctly for hundreds and thousand of years. The records show us, further, that Israel, instead of attaining to monotheism by self-development, was, on the other hand, constantly inclining toward that most infamous religion—the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth.

- It is a matter of profound regret that India must lose the services of the Rev. J. M. McComb, M. A. Because of his great modesty, his services have hardly been appreciated by any but those near enough to see for themselves. Mr. McComb has wrought a good work and many Indian brethren as well as European will miss his kindly presence. His work in the Boys' Boarding School, his energy in pushing the College idea so as to bring about the reopening of the Mission College at Lahore, his work in the College as a professor, his work as a Superintendent of village Missions, his work as the Editor of the *Indian Standard*, and finally his work as Principal of the Woodstock School have stamped him as a "workman that needeth not be ashamed."

We are not without hope that God will lead him back again to the field of his first love. In any case we are sure he will do a good work wherever he may be led. We wish him and his good wife God speed and commend them both to the grace of Almighty God.

In the surrounding Semitic nations, at the same time, instead of there being any upward tendency, heathenism had sunk to its lowest level, and was utterly divorced from truth. The people worshipped a deity which has been described as the "embodiment of animal lust and devilish cruelty." Not the ethically good, but the ethically wicked was the ideal in the base Baal worship.

The religion of India furnishes us an excellent example. The recent work of eminent Sanskrit scholars and

the translation of the Vedas open up for our study a large and, until recently, an unexplored field for study and investigation. The development there can be easily traced, and the succeeding steps in the downward march are easily noted. It is probable that there originally the people worshiped one invisible holy God. Then we find them reverencing the mere forces of nature as manifestations of God. Eventually these forces come to be deified; and under an artful, priestly hierarchy, a polytheistic pantheism is developed. Lastly we get the pure, thorough-going pantheism of modern Hinduism. This development is clearly seen in the literature of the different periods, and is admirably illustrated in the collections of "Indian Wisdom" made by Sir Monier Williams. "Although innumerable gods and goddesses," says he, "gifted with a thousand shapes, now crowd the Hindu pantheon, appealing to the instincts of the unthinking millions, it is probable that there existed for the first Aryan worshippers a simpler theistic creed, even as a thoughtful Hindu to-day looks through the maze of his mythology to the conception of one divine, self-existent Being—one all-pervading Spirit, into whose unity all visible symbols are gathered, and in whose essence all entities are comprehended."

So Max Muller has declared. "There is a monotheism that precedes the polytheism of the Veda and even in the invocations of their innumerable gods, the remembrance of a God one and infinite breaks through the mist of an idolatrous phraseology like the blue sky that is hidden by passing clouds" (Hist. Sanskrit Lit., p. 559). In the Vedic period the traces of monotheism are fast becoming obliterated with polytheistic notions; yet in the early *mantras* (or hymns) of the Rig Veda, there is a theistic foundation for all the thought; and in some of these hymns there seems to be a tolerably clear and well defined monotheism.

Even the different names which are used are not at first names of different deities, but of the different manifestations of the one Deity, as is seen in the fact that of Agni, Surya, Indra and Vishnu, and still later of Varuna, it is said, "He is king of all gods and men."

In no mythological polytheistic system could this be said of more than one. Hence it is evident that these *Devas* were at that time regarded not as distinct individual deities but rather as manifestations (as Prof. Ebrard calls them, as *Prosopa*) of the one invisible a mighty and holy God. Heat, fire, rain, etc., were the manifestations of God; and he was worshipped under a different name as he was revealed through a different manifestation of his presence. In each of these, through which he disclosed his infinitely rich nature, he is still the highest, the one Almighty God, the "King of all Gods."

The consciousness that these are but names for the one God, in the early hymns, seems to be quite persistent. Thus in an ancient hymn (Rig Veda I. 164) we read, "They call Him, Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni. He is also the fleet-winged Heavenly Garutmat. That which is One, the wise name, by various terms they call him, Agni Yama Matarisvan." So in the laws of Manu, at the 123 verse of the twelfth book, we read, "Him some adore as transcendently present in fire, others in Manu, Lord of creatures; some as more distinctly present in Indra; others in pure air; others as the most high eternal spirit."

It is evident that, at this time, though there were many names for the one God, the intention was to invoke only the one God; and though many manifestations were discovered and worshipped, yet back of the various manifestations, only one Almighty God was thought of.

As we proceed, however, to the Brahmanical period, when the priesthood is developed, it becomes evident that they have forgotten that Indra, Agni and Surya are only names for the one God. The thought of their being only *Prosopa* is so beclouded that they are represented as entirely separate beings, existing independent of each other. With the development of the priesthood, the last traces of monotheism disappear; and the forces of nature, which have been worshipped as the manifestations of God, are

*Some call him Agni (Fire), others Manu, the Lord of Creatures, others Indra, others the vital air, and again others eternal Brahman" (vid. "Sacred Books of the East," Vol. XXV. pp. 512-513).

now worshipped as separate *Devas*. Thus while in the earliest hymns only one Deity—and He under only a single name—is worshipped in any one hymn; in the later period a single hymn may divide its praise between two or more of these *Devas* (cf. Ebrard, Vol. II, p. 164). The progress then is clear. First the people had a conception of the all-powerful, holy God. Next they discovered that He was manifested through the separate powers of nature. These powers afterward came to be personified, thus, for the time, standing for God. Finally they were worshipped by the people, who forgot that they only represented the one invisible essence. Hence in thought they are separated from God, and from each other; and the Hindu pantheon soon becomes filled to overflowing with innumerable gods and goddesses.

More substantial evidence than that found in the Veda, of the original Theism of the Hindus, as well as of the whole Aryan race, is found in the word itself for God—"Deva"—a word which is common to the whole Indo-Aryan family of languages, appearing under modified forms in Sanskrit *Dyaus* (the sky) *Dyauspatir*, reappearing in the Greek *Zeus*, *Dios* (Aeolic *Deus*), in the Latin *Deus*, *Jovis*, *Caestus*, *Jus*; O. H. German *Zu*; Celtic *Dia*. (Some philologists also connect with this the Chinese *Thian* (God of Heaven), the Japanese *Teu*, the Mayan *Teotl* and the old Peruvian *Tici*.)

This common word for God indicates that at least the different branches of the Aryan family originally all worshipped one God. And that they worshipped only one before their separation is evident in the fact that there is no other name of Deity or deities common to the different branches of the family. After polytheism begins to be developed, we find the different branches of the family calling the corresponding gods by different names.

Thus the Sun God in India was *Mitra*, in Greece, *Phoebos*. The Fire God in India, *Agnis*; in Greece, *Pephaistos*. The Blue Heaven God in India, *Indra*, and in Greece, *Athene*.

Certainly, it would seem, there was a time when the Greeks and Hindus were monotheists, worshipping the one God *Zeus*, *Dyaus*, *Dios*, *Deva*. There came another time when they had each come to worship Him through His manifestations. But for these manifestations they have words quite different and unlike. Hence this first step toward polytheism was probably not taken until a later period; until after they had separated from one

another and from their ancient Iranian home.

We find, however, an apparent exception in the name Varuna, which seems to be etymologically connected with the Zend *Ahura* and with the Greek *Ouranos*. But these names are used with different acceptations, and in the Indian mythology, Varuna seems to occupy a unique place. Thus Varuna is the "All-embracing," the "Lord of Heaven and Earth."

The following hymn as translated by Mioner Williams exhibits a pure monotheism that seems worthy of comparison with some of the hymns of the Hebrew Psalter:

"The mighty Varuna who rules above, looks down
Upon these worlds, his kingdom, as if close at hand
When men imagine they do aught by stealth, he knows it,
No one can stand, or walk or softly glide along
Or hide in dark recess, or lurk in secret cell
But Varuna detects him, and his movement spies—
Two persons may devise some plot together sitting
In private and alone; but he, the King, is there
A third, and sees it all. This boundless earth is his,
His the vast sky whose depths no mortal e'er can fathom.
Both oceans find a place within his body, yet
In that small pool he lies contained.
Who'er should flee
Far, far beyond the sky, would not escape the grasp
Of Varuna, the King. His messengers descend
Countless from his abode forever traversing
This world, and scanning, with a thousand eyes, its inmates.
Whatever exists within this earth, and all within the sky,
Yea all that is beyond, King Varuna perceives.
The winkings of men's eyes are numbered all by him.
He wields the universe as gamblers handle dice."

Undoubtedly another example of the declining monotheism of the Rig Veda is seen in the Tenth Book, 129th hymn, "In the beginning there was neither naught nor aught. Then was neither day, nor night, nor light nor darkness. . . . Only the *Existent One* breathed calmly, self-contained."

Prof. Max Muller maintains that while there is a kind of monotheism in these early hymns, it is of such an order that of necessity it lapses into polytheism. He is an advocate of primitive *henotheism* as distinguished from monotheism—a belief in one God as distinguished from the one only God. He holds that this *henotheism* naturally develops into polytheism. His view, as explained in his Hibbert Lectures (*vid.* "Origin and Growth of Religion," p. 245, *et seq.*), seems to us to be strangely unsatisfactory, and incon-

sistent with his own utterances elsewhere, as well as with the results of his long-continued investigations in Oriental fields. He has admitted that "there is a monotheism which precedes the polytheism of the Veda," that in all religions there is apparent "a tendency to decline and decay."

In his recent Gifford Lectures, he declares ("Natural Religion," p. 219,) "Fetichism from its very nature cannot be primitive because it always presupposes the previous growth of the divine predicate," thus squarely antagonizing the view of Hartmann and of the entire school of materialistic and pantheistic evolutionists. He emphasizes this. Instead of being the first step upward, "Fetichism is the very last corruption of religion" (*Idem*, p. 196). In another place he tells us (*Idem*, p. 134) that his principal object has always been "to discover an historical evolution or a continuous growth in religion as well as in language." He expresses surprise that some should attack him as not being "a thorough-going evolutionist," and continues, "For the present I certainly am, and mean to remain an evolutionist in the study of language, mythology and religion. *i.e.*, I shall always try to discover in them an intelligible historical growth."

Is it not possible that this purpose of his has biased his judgment? Is it not a fact that, in his effort to keep in touch with the evolution of his time, he has been led to explain away with his benotheistic theory what seems to others to be clear traces of a declining monotheism?

The question for us now is not regarding the quality or extent of the knowledge which the people possessed concerning the one God. But are there unmistakable traces of monotheism in the early Sanskrit literature? Was there an idea of the one God?

And in reaching an affirmative answer to the question we find ourselves indebted to no one more than to Max Muller, whose learned researches give abundant evidence of a downward tendency which he himself seems almost unwilling to acknowledge. "Indeed, he is," in the words of Prof. Ellinwood (*vid.* CHRISTIAN THOUGHT, Vol. V., p. 205) "a chief witness for a primitive and universal monotheism, and chief witness also for the universality of a revelation of the one God made to all races of men." The same author instances that remarkable passage in Muller's "Science of Religion," where he says while speaking of old systems, "Like an old precious metal, the ancient religion, after the dust of ages has been removed, will come out in all its purity and brightness and the image which it discloses will be the

image of the Father, the Father of all nations, and the superscription, when we can read it again, will be not only in Judea, but in the languages of all the races of the world—the word of God revealed where alone it can be revealed—in the heart of man."

It is not for us here to discuss how this revelation was made, whether externally or internally, whether by written revelation or by intuition; that is not a part of our subject; but that the revelation was made, and that it was a revelation made to the entire race, the researches of Prof. Muller, as well as those of all other leading investigators, seem to teach.

That most interesting theistic movement in India, which is represented in the Brahmo Samaj, and which came to its present position of power under Keshub Chunder Sen, is interesting in that it is a protest against both pantheism and polytheism; but more, it is the outgrowth of a conviction, on the part of its founder and advocates that the early creed of India was theistic. Theism taught not as something new but as *the original faith*. Roy, the founder of the school, nearly sixty years ago maintained that if the oldest sacred books—especially the Upanishads—were correctly interpreted they would be found to teach monotheism.

We have dwelt thus, at some length upon the course of religious development in India, because few Oriental fields are so open to our investigation. Furthermore the high antiquity of the Sanskrit enables us to see, perhaps better than anywhere else, the natural tendency of religious development as illustrated during a comparatively long period of time.

The early importance of that branch of the great Aryan family, justifies us in looking upon its religious history as representative, and in a general way illustrative of the principles which have controlled in the religious development of the kindred Aryan nations. *To be continued.*

Formal Observance Not Enough.

Merely waiting on God by formal and stated observance of church ordinances will no more communicate to the sinner's soul the joys of Christian's salvation than walking to the bubbling fountain give relief to the heated thirsty man. Not until he drink of the water is his burning thirst assuaged; and so, not until the convicted sinner takes hold of Christ by a living faith and actually appropriates him to himself as his own living, loving, atoning Redeemer can he find relief from his crushing sense of guilt, and experience the joys of full salvation.

Religious Telescope.

Telegrams.

London, March 8.

A Rome despatch says that Admiral Grenet aboard the war-ship "Stromboli" sails from Venice in a few days to take the command of the Italian squadron of six ships which is concentrating in China.

The British Minister at Peking has informed the Tsung-li Yamen that any attempt by China to repudiate the Newchwang Railway loan contract will be regarded as a serious breach of faith, meriting retribution. He has also repeated the assurance that Great Britain will support China against any other Power attempting to enforce the repudiation of the contract.

London, March 8.

Numerous proofs are forthcoming that the explosion of the magazine at Toulon on Sunday last, by which 85 were killed and 132 wounded, was the result of foul play, but the cause of the explosion is unknown.

London, March 8.

The plague has spread to Mecca. Riots have occurred at Jeddah arising from the plague measures, and a number of Indian pilgrims were robbed of twelve hundred pounds. The Sultan has promised compensation.

Agra, March 8.

Another daring dacoity by an armed gang has taken place here. The house of a wealthy zemindar was broken into and after the occupants had been cowed by a few shots being fired from guns, a large quantity of valuables were taken away. The police inquiry is proceeding, but the outlaws are not yet discovered.

London, March 9.

In the House of Commons to-day, Mr. Brodrick, replying to a series of questions regarding the Newchwang Railway loan, said it was understood that the protest of M. de Giers, the Russian Minister at Peking, was directed against the supposed tendency of China to ignore her prior engagements with Russia, and not against the British loan. Mr. Brodrick also added that Lord Salisbury's declaration of 1st August 1898, guaranteeing British support to the Chinese Government against any Power committing an act of aggression upon China for permitting British subjects to construct or support railways in China, remains unmodified, but it was not anticipated to arise in connection with the Northern Extension Railway.

London, March 10.

M. De Staal, Russian Ambassador in London, paid a visit to the Foreign Office recently, and it is thought that Mr. Brodrick's reply in the House of Commons yesterday evening to the questions concerning the Newchwang Railway loan, was possibly the outcome of M. De Staal's explanations.

Later.

In the House of Commons on Thursday, Mr. Brodrick, when replying to the question regarding the Newchwang Railway loan, added that the Government had reason to believe the Russian protest would not be renewed.

Reuter, telegraphing from Peking, says that consequent upon negotiations between Russia and England, M. de Giers has withdrawn his protest against the Newchwang Railway loan.

London, March 10.

A corrected statement of the naval estimates introduced in the House of Commons by Mr. Goschen yesterday, omits the two battle-ships mentioned in the shipbuilding programme and the sum to be expended in Wei-hai-wei is not

specified; the figures cabled in connection therewith applying to expenditure under the Naval Works Bill. It is intended to make Wei-hai-wei a secondary naval base with adequate fortifications, coal stores and small repairing shops.

London, March 10.

The authorities at Lorenzo Marques forbade the landing of Bombay deck passengers on the steamer "Courland," which was compelled to return to Zanzibar.

Karachi, March 10.

Foot and mouth disease has broken out in parts of Karachi.

Bombay March 11.

Advice from Aden says that the trouble in French Somaliland regarding the railway has been magnified considerably.

The report says that a determined attack was made for the second time on Djibouti, the Somalis being strengthened by all the Somali police employed there, who have joined their brethren, taking with them all their arms and ammunition. Five or six Europeans were killed, and several wounded.

Bombay, March 11.

In the interior of Arabia the Turks have knocked up against the Arabs in the district of Hijah. The Turkish Commander, with four divisions of various kinds of troops, attacked the town of Shahil, which was being occupied by the Arab Chief with three or four thousand men. A battle ensued, when the Turks lost 160 killed, and the Arabs 300.

Agra, March 11.

Moula Bux and Muhammad Ismail, the well-known local merchants who were charged by the Agra Municipal Board, under Section 417 of the Indian Penal Code, with evading Octroi duty have been acquitted, their counsel, Mr. Percy Ball, Advocate of the High Court, having argued that his clients were justified in not paying anything, as Octroi cannot be levied on goods that have paid import duty at a seaport. The result of the case which was of considerable interest to business men has given the commercial community great satisfaction.

London, March 13.

A Reuter's telegram from Peking says that the Tsung-li Yamen has informed the Italian Minister, Signor Martino, that it agrees to receive back the Italian Note, but nothing is said indicating the Yamen's willingness to agree to the demand for the lease of Sanmun.

Later.

There was a brief discussion in the House of Commons to-day on the question of the Italian demand for a lease of Sanmun. Mr. Brodrick said that if Italy can by diplomacy secure concessions, Great Britain will welcome Italy's appearance in China. The British policy was to safeguard her own interests not to obstruct friendly Powers from safeguarding theirs, and Britain was willing to support Italy by diplomatic means.

London, March 13.

A general advance of American troops from Manila commenced to-day under a heavy fire from the insurgents, who have been driven back with severe loss.

London, March 13.

The death is announced of Mrs. Keeley, the celebrated actress.

Bombay, March 14.

There were 128 attacks and 131 deaths in Bombay yesterday; total mortality, 324.

Karachi, March 14.

Particulars received by a Gulf steamer which arrived here last evening, show that a rupture has occurred between the Sheikh of Bharin and the Persian authorities. The Persian gunboat "Persepolis" is reported to have gone near Bharin under cover of night, landed a number of men, and opened

fire on the palace. The Sheikh made a desperate stand, a few being lost on each side, and then fled for shelter to a fort some miles off. The Sheikh has a fairly large number of followers, and will, it is believed, make efforts to regain Bharin unless it is left protected.

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